

play—and that seems to be pretty frequently—you know, for a national championship or in important games, they think of Bear Bryant, Coach Bryant—the coach—and how he kind of got the whole Alabama football dynasty going. That is another thing that is interesting; that Chairman SHELBY knew Bear Bryant and worked with some of Bear Bryant's other really great players, like Joe Namath and a few others.

So I loved hearing those stories. I have to tell you that, not only now but for as long as I am around, I will always take an abiding interest in watching the Alabama football team play.

Most people probably think, you know, when they think about icons and are watching the Alabama football game and go, “Oh, yes, that Bear Bryant, didn't he start something amazing? Isn't that an amazing dynasty?”—oh, I have got to do one quick story, and that is we like to kid the chairman.

One year, Alabama had a particularly good football team, and a story we were kind of teasing him about was, Hey, did you see the new football rankings that came out for college football?

You know, we would say: Well, who was No. 1?

He would say: Well, Alabama, of course.

They would say: Well, then, who was No. 2?

Well, Alabama's second string.

Then we would say: Ah, that is good. How about No. 3?

Well, that is Clemson—or somebody else.

We would say: OK. Well, how about No. 4?

Well, that is Alabama's third string. So we would like to tease and have fun.

But whenever I watch the Alabama football games now, it is not only about Bear Bryant; I think about Chairman SHELBY. I think about all of the amazing things that he has done in Congress, in the House and in the Senate, not only for Alabama—and he has done quite a few good things for Alabama, but he has done an awful lot of good things for this country. I think, where the rubber really hits the road on so many of these things when legislation gets authorized, whether it is defense or anything else, it has got to be funded.

So, if you really look back at the length of this gentleman's career in the House and in the Senate and at what he has actually done and at all of the things that he has been a part of and been involved with, it is monumental. It is iconic. It is a big, big deal, and we are going to miss him a lot.

I just want to say thank you to Senator SHELBY and to his wonderful, beautiful, classy wife, Annette, from both myself and my wife, Mikey. It has been great working with him. I hope we will see a lot of him in the future.

Congratulations on just an incredible career in the U.S. Congress and U.S. Senate.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

(Mr. Kaine assumed the Chair.)

(Mr. Booker assumed the Chair.)

Mr. Kaine. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

200TH ANNIVERSARY OF UNITED STATES AND MEXICO BILATERAL RELATIONS

Mr. Kaine. Mr. President, I do rise for multiple purposes. The first is to acknowledge that earlier this week, on Monday, December 12, we marked the historic bicentennial of diplomatic relations between the United States and Mexico.

Our two countries share a 2,000-mile border, an extensive trade, security, economic, cultural, and familial ties.

Our cultural ties are particularly deep. Forty million Americans have Mexican heritage, many of whom are proud residents of Virginia. People of Mexican origin represent nearly 60 percent of our Nation's Hispanic population, and 2 million Americans live in Mexico. These people-to-people ties are invaluable.

The two countries share an important tradition of democracy, and those traditions require consistent work and maintenance to ensure strong and independent institutions, rule of law, and democratic freedoms.

We know that upholding democracy in both our nations isn't always easy, but it is a vital endeavor, and it is the bedrock of our partnership. As we celebrate the bicentennial, it is crucial that the Senate and the U.S. Government as a whole continue all efforts to advance this relationship.

I want to commend the Biden administration for working side by side with Mexican leaders and taking on the many challenges we face together. This is exactly what we should be doing with such a close neighboring partner, and I am committing to continue to support these efforts through my role on the Foreign Relations Subcommittee over the Americas, which I chair.

Through the high-level economic dialogue, the high-level security dialogue, the North American Leaders' Summit, and innumerable local and national engagements, the United States and Mexico have worked more closely in addressing our shared priorities.

We have got to ensure that the future of the U.S.-Mexico relationship continues to be grounded in shared prosperity and the protection of fundamental freedoms that are so important to both of our people.

I will have a more formal and detailed statement on the bicentennial that I will have submitted for the RECORD.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Now, Mr. President, if I may continue, I want to rise, together with my colleague from New Hampshire, Senator SHAHEEN, to seek consent to advance the nomination of a friend, Dr. Geeta Rao Gupta for Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues. And I would like to ask if I might yield time now to my colleague from New Hampshire, Senator SHAHEEN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you to my colleague from Virginia, Senator Kaine. I am really pleased to join you on the floor in support of Dr. Gupta to be Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues at the Department of State.

Sadly, this isn't the first time that I have come to the floor to raise Dr. Gupta's nomination here with our colleagues in the Senate but also with our colleagues on the Foreign Relations Committee.

I have to admit that it is disappointing to still be standing here trying to convince my colleagues that women's rights matter. They matter whether they are in the United States, in Afghanistan, in Iran, in China, or in Venezuela.

Partisan obstruction should not prevent a qualified nominee from undertaking the necessary work of the Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues. I have to be honest, it feels to me like what is at issue here is more than just the Office of Global Women's Issues. It feels like the Members of this body don't understand the role of that office and think that anytime there is something that has “women” in the title, that we must be talking about reproductive rights. Well, that is not what the Office of Global Women's Issues does. Reproductive rights are not part of that office, and it is disappointing that we are here still debating whether we are going to put in an Ambassador into that office, when since the beginning of the Trump administration, we have only had about a year when we have had an Ambassador at the Office of Global Women's Issues.

I would say to my colleagues across the aisle who are worried about Dr. Gupta's record to meet with her. Sit down and talk about what she would prioritize as Ambassador for Global Women's Issues. They should request a briefing with USAID's Office of Global Health because that is where their work is done to address women's healthcare.

What USAID's Office of Global Health has done is to reduce maternal deaths by 30 percent annually. It saves the lives of 1.4 million children under 5 each year, and it decreases—let me repeat that—it decreases the number of abortions, particularly unsafe abortions, that happen around the world. But that is not what the Office of Global Women's Issues does.

I hope they won't continue to hold up Dr. Gupta's nomination because they

don't understand how women's health is supported by the U.S. Government or which offices do the work that they object to.

The Office of Global Women's Issues is charged with advancing the rights and liberation of women and girls around the world through our U.S. foreign policy. It endeavors to empower women and eliminate barriers that prevent them from achieving equity and equality, particularly economic equity and equality.

Not only does the Office of Global Women's Issues prioritize policies and programs to advance the status of women around the world, it ensures that U.S. policies incorporate a gender lens at all levels of policy and decision making.

And now more than ever, we need an office that is charged with leading U.S. policy on women, because around the world, what we have seen as the result of the last few years of this pandemic is that the gender gap has grown. Girls are dropping out and staying out of school at a higher rate than boys; the female labor-force participation rate has declined, with women holding less secure jobs and taking on even more unpaid child and housing labor than before the pandemic; and gender-based violence has increased to such an extent that U.N. Women—the U.N. body charged with advancing the rights of women globally—now warns of what they are calling a shadow pandemic of violence.

These are issues of consequence to half—more than half—of the world's population. They need a champion in our U.S. foreign policy. They need Dr. Gupta.

Gender equity, equality, and the empowerment of women and girls must be a focal point of U.S. policy, and that is exactly what the Ambassador at Large is intended to facilitate.

The reason it matters to our foreign policy is because what we know is that when women are empowered, their families are empowered; they give back more to their families and their communities than men do; and societies that empower women are more stable societies.

These are issues that we need to pay attention to. We need someone in that role who is going to pay attention to those issues. And that is what Dr. Gupta would do if she is approved.

(Ms. SMITH assumed the Chair.)

So, Madam President, Senator Kaine, that is why we are here again on the floor in support of Dr. Gupta's nomination in hopes that our colleagues on both sides of the aisle—but particularly our Republican colleagues—will recognize what the Office of Global Women's Issues does and understand that it is not the office that is working on reproductive rights for women.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. Kaine. Madam President, in just a second, I will make a motion for unanimous consent. Before I do, I just

want to say, this Nation has a bipartisan track record of fielding fantastic women diplomats: Secretary Clinton, Secretary Rice, Secretary Albright. So this is something that we do well and we have done well in a bipartisan way.

My colleague from New Hampshire talked about what this important position does and what it doesn't do. I just want to say a few words about Dr. Gupta.

She is a nationally recognized leader and expert on women's contributions to economic prosperity and stability. She has over three decades of experience in research, policy formulation, advocacy, and the implementations of policies and programs to empower women and girls; that includes 5 years at UNICEF and a decade as the president and CEO of a U.S.-based research institute.

She has taken, throughout her career, an evidence-based approach to demonstrate again and again one irrefutable fact: Investing in women is one of the best tools to promote economic development and stability.

Because of her strong reputation, because of the importance of the role, because of the fact that this is not a position that deals with some of the issues that often cause controversy on the floor—reproductive rights—I now move to the following:

I ask unanimous consent that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee be discharged, and the Senate proceed to the following nomination: PN1578, Dr. Geeta Rao Gupta, to be U.S. Ambassador at Large For Global Women's Issues; that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that no further motions be made in order to the nomination; and that any related statements be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. Lankford. Reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. Lankford. Madam President, let me clarify what this motion is. This motion today is to ask for a unanimous consent of all 100 Senators to be able to move a nominee through the process, a nominee that, when she came through the Foreign Relations Committee, every single Republican opposed—every one of them.

It seems the frustration here doesn't seem to be with Republicans; it seems to be with the Democratic leader, quite frankly. This nominee was brought to the committee last year and then was voted out of the committee in July of this year but has never been brought to the floor for a vote—never. Instead, it has been to try to do a unanimous consent when my colleagues full well know that every single Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee opposes this nominee. And now the request is: Now that you opposed her in com-

mittee, now consent on the floor to be able to support her. That is not going to happen, obviously.

Now, we have not blocked a vote. If the Democratic leader wants to be able to bring this nominee to a vote, he has had plenty of opportunity to be able to do that and still has plenty of opportunity to be able to do that. No one is inhibiting a vote on the floor.

What we oppose is what is being pushed onto us to say: Now unanimously consent to someone you know you don't agree to in the first place. It has often been interesting in this conversation to say this nominee has nothing to do with reproductive rights, has nothing to do with that. I have heard that from my colleagues.

It is fascinating to me that Planned Parenthood put out a statement in strong support of this nominee and specifically stated in their release: because she will speak out on reproductive rights for women globally.

So either Planned Parenthood is not telling the truth or something else. So it is interesting, when we get into this dialogue, to say: OK, let's just have the vote on it and allow everyone to be able to speak out.

We have a disagreement on this nominee, but it is the right of the Democratic leader to be able to bring who he chooses to the floor for a vote at any time. But I would say, as one Republican of many, please don't ask me to unanimously consent to someone that we have a philosophical difference with.

So, with that, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. Kaine. Madam President, in response to my colleague, might I modify my request because, certainly, someone should have the right to vote no if they want to vote no. So let me modify my request.

I would ask unanimous consent that the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations be discharged and that the Senate proceed to the following nomination: PN1578, Geeta Rao Gupta, of Virginia, to be Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues; and that the Senate vote on the nomination at a time to be determined by the Senate leadership.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. Lankford. Reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. Lankford. Madam President, I would say to my colleague that, obviously, I am not in the position to be able to make a decision for all of my colleagues at this moment whether that is acceptable. That is something we should discuss with the ranking member of the Foreign Relations Committee and with the Republican leader and allow our conference to be able to have that dialogue if that is an acceptable thing.

So at this point, I would object just saying I am not in a position because I am not going to speak for the ranking member of the Foreign Relations Committee, who voted unanimously in opposition to this nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Will my colleague yield for a question?

Mr. LANKFORD. Absolutely.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. I think, perhaps, I wasn't clear. I didn't talk about Dr. Gupta's position on reproductive rights for women. I talked about the role of the Office of Global Women's Issues.

When I supported Kelley Currie, who was nominated by President Trump to be the head of the Office of Global Women's Issues, I didn't ask what her position was on choice; I asked her what she was going to do if she took that role. And she had an excellent history of working on issues that matter to women and foreign policy, and because that is not the Agency that is charged with women's reproductive health in our government, I didn't think that should be the basis on which I judged whether she was the appropriate person to take over that role.

And, sadly, what seems to have happened is that because Dr. Gupta personally says she is pro-choice, all of the anti-choice organizations have made her nomination an issue.

So I would ask my colleague: Have you sat down with Dr. Gupta? Have you asked her what she would do in her role if she is approved to be the head of Global Women's Issues and whether that was something that she was going to talk about or work on?

Mr. LANKFORD. If I may respond to my colleague as well.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Have I engaged in a colloquy, in a conversation? Actually, I have not. The members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, as you serve faithfully in that role—that is not a committee I serve on, but I do know that all the Republican members of the committee have had the opportunity to be able to sit down with her personally and to be able to go through all of those notes.

I know how she came through the committee without any Republican support at all, and I know the different statements that have been put up—one by Planned Parenthood, a very strong statement in support of her specifically on the issue of women's reproductive rights.

That seems to say, at least somebody is saying this role is going to take on that issue. But that is not a committee that I currently serve on, but I do know those well who do.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. I would just say to my colleague, having sat through those hearings, which my recollection is only one or two Republicans on the committee showed up and that most of the people who I talked to had not actually

talked to Dr. Gupta, didn't actually know what the Office of Global Women's Issues does. And it is very disappointing that they are going to make a decision based on a press release from Planned Parenthood as opposed to looking at what she would actually do in that role and the responsibilities of that office.

So I am—you know, you guys think that every time you see "women" in a title, as I said, we are talking about reproductive rights. That is not the case. There is a lot that women do besides having babies.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Madam President, I would affirm, again, as a husband and as a dad of two daughters and as someone who is very passionate about global women's issues as well, I am fully aware that women do a lot more than have babies—regardless of Health and Human Services currently using the term "birthing people" and "menstruating persons," which, again, I find offensive in the process as well—that this is a group of people, half the population of the Earth, that has made tremendous contributions, including my own wife and my own family.

I would just simply ask the question: This is not a nominee that we are going to give unanimous support to, but I am unsure why the Democratic leader has not scheduled this vote now for months on the floor when there have been months that we have been in session but it has yet to be scheduled for a vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. KAINE. Madam President, I said I was rising for multiple purposes. It is now my third purpose, but I would seek consent to speak—I know we have a vote call at 5—for about 5 minutes on legislation being contemplated tomorrow.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. KAINE. Madam President, we are currently in consideration of the National Defense Authorization Act, and the leadership is working out a timing agreement for a vote possibly on one or more amendments and then a vote on the NDAA.

The Defense bill is the most important thing I work on every year as a member of the Armed Services Committee, and I think the Defense bill that our Armed Services Committee did with strong bipartisan support is a very strong one. The timing isn't to my liking, that it took so long to reach an agreement with the House. But it is what it is. The Defense bill is strong.

We are likely to have a vote on an amendment tomorrow offered by my friend and colleague JOE MANCHIN dealing with permitting reform, and I wanted to stand on the floor to express my objection not to the topic and even not to much of the substance but to

one particular provision that I think is horrible policy and I think will cause me to oppose the amendment.

Do we need to do permitting reform to accelerate infrastructure in this country? We do. We do. Many of the permitting reform rules—FERC, for example—are decades old, and they haven't kept up with new technologies or new needs of our population. I am strongly of the belief that we should do permitting reform, and I have introduced my own bills going back years to make at least that permitting process work better.

The amendment that we are going to be voting on tomorrow, at least as I have been told—I haven't seen the language, but I have been told it is very similar to an amendment that was offered in September. It is an 88-page permitting reform bill. Eighty-five pages are permitting reform; the last three pages are the opposite of permitting reform.

What do I mean by that? Eighty-five pages of the bill go deeply into permitting for infrastructure, especially energy infrastructure, and propose a whole series of reforms, many of which I strongly support.

Although I had no hand in the drafting of that bill and I think I could improve it if I was involved, I would give that bill a good solid B or B-plus, and I would have no trouble voting for it as an amendment to the Defense bill or a stand-alone bill.

However, the last three pages of the bill take a particular single project—100 miles of which is in Virginia—called the Mountain Valley Pipeline and exempts it from permitting reform. It, essentially, says this 85-page reform that sets up how a project should be considered and approved by administrative agencies and then reviewed by the judiciary if there are complaints about it—that is what the 85 pages does, but then the last three pages says the Mountain Valley Pipeline should be exempt from all of that, should get an administrative green light. And, in a provision that I find to be both unprecedented and really troubling, it suggests that if individuals want to seek judicial review of Mountain Valley Pipeline, the current jurisdiction in the Federal code which would suggest that that suit would be heard in the Fourth Judicial Circuit, which includes Virginia, the case about one project, the Mountain Valley Pipeline, will be stripped away from the court where it is currently being litigated and all future litigation must happen in the DC circuit.

Now, never in the history of this body has Congress gone into the middle of a case and, because a corporation was not happy with the rulings of the court, stripped the case away from that court and given it to another court. And I have verified that through my own staff in research since this provision came up in September: stripping a case away from a court.

Now, this is my hometown court. It is headquartered in Richmond. The